



To: Joel Boyd, Superintendent
From: Billie Jo Turner, Assistant Superintendent of Finance/CFO
RE: Substitute Shortage with Suggestions
Date: September 21, 2021

Overview

Lowell Public Schools, like most districts across the nation, have historically faced a shortage with substitute teachers and this has been significantly exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic. In FY18/19, 75% of absences were covered with substitutes leaving only 25% uncovered. In FY19/20, the number of covered absences decreased to 70% leaving 30% uncovered. Alarming, this number has now dropped to 37% covered and 63% uncovered during these first few weeks back to school since COVID. More than 60% of such absences are due to sick days (40%) and maternity leave (22.66%). The remainder are due to causes such as bereavement, jury duty, medical leave, professional development and religious holidays. Sick calls have increased since COVID in addition to the available substitute pool dropping from over 400 subs to only 81 listed this year. A comparison of the first weeks in September from the FY18/19 to this current year shows up to a 33% increase in absences.

Proposed Solutions

The rate for day to day substitutes has not increased for many years. The current hourly rate for subs with no degree is \$13/hr. which is little more than minimum wage. The rate for retired teachers is only \$17/hr. despite the average hourly rate of an active teacher being over \$70/hr. The actual substitute costs from Munis shows an average use of daily subs to be between 83 and 90. If we increase the substitute hourly rates by \$2.50 each, the District cost would be approximately \$230,000. This increased rate may improve our marketability. However, it is not likely to have more than minimal impact since the research on the nationwide shortage shows that the cause is likely to stem more from the significant exodus from the education field since COVID. Despite the lack of confidence in the impact such an increase would have, it does seem as though it is long past due. The chart below shows the difference in hourly rates based on a \$2.50/hr rate increase and a \$5/hr rate increase.

Substitutes No Degree	\$80/day	\$	13.33	
Substitutes With Degree	\$90/day	\$	15.00	
Substitutes - Retired Teacher	\$105/day	\$	17.50	
Substitutes No Degree	\$95/day	\$	15.83	\$ 2.50

Substitutes With Degree	\$105/day	\$	17.50	\$	2.50
Substitutes - Retired Teacher	\$120/day	\$	20.00	\$	2.50
Substitutes No Degree	\$110/day	\$	18.33	\$	2.50
Substitutes With Degree	\$120/day	\$	20.00	\$	2.50
Substitutes - Retired Teacher	\$135/day	\$	22.50	\$	2.50

Another recommended option is to provide a Building Substitute at each of the Renaissance schools. Ten Building Subs would be distributed among the seven schools. This would be an ideal option for all of the schools but would cost the district nearly \$1.5 million even if we only paid \$35,000 per year due to the cost of fringe benefits. The \$1.5 million would cover 35 Building Substitutes which would be distributed through the schools using a .5, 1.0 or 2.0 ratio based on current enrollment. This would be a pilot year to see if this is effective. We would work with AESOP software to see if there is a tracking mechanism that shows the need per school so that future allocations of building subs would be based on trend analysis rather than simply enrollment. If we only offer this option to the seven Renaissance schools, the cost to the district would be \$294,000 assuming the rate of pay would be approved at \$35,000 per year plus fringe.

This cost could be covered by ESSER since having a substitute in the building would help address learning loss. The chart below shows the ten highest paid permanent subs in Massachusetts as of September 2021. As reflected, Lowell is already listed at one of the ten. We could still consider raising the Lowell rate of \$33k to \$35k per the suggestion above. If we elect to pay the \$35k for this position, that would be in line with Worcester, Lynn, Quincy and Boston and more than both Brockton and Springfield.

City	Annual Salary	Monthly Pay	Weekly Pay	Hourly Wage
Barnstable Town	\$37,294	\$3,108	\$717	\$17.93
Cambridge	\$37,136	\$3,095	\$714	\$17.85
Worcester	\$35,876	\$2,990	\$690	\$17.25
Lynn	\$35,474	\$2,956	\$682	\$17.05
Boston	\$34,926	\$2,910	\$672	\$16.79
Quincy	\$34,252	\$2,854	\$659	\$16.47
Lowell	\$33,866	\$2,822	\$651	\$16.28
Springfield	\$33,062	\$2,755	\$636	\$15.90
Brockton	\$32,202	\$2,683	\$619	\$15.48
Leominster	\$30,679	\$2,557	\$590	\$14.75

Another option would be to hire ten additional paras that could serve specifically as building substitutes. After fifteen days, paras are moved up to first year teacher rates which is approximately \$48k. Thus, the cost of this proposal would be \$13k higher than the building substitute idea. Again, this cost proposal could be funded by ESSER dollars.

Recommendation

- 1) Recommend School Committee approve 10 additional positions for Renaissance Schools and decide on whether the positions should be paras or building substitutes
- 2) Recommend that we post the positions immediately
- 3) Recommend an increase to the Day to Day sub rates by \$2.50
- 4) Recommend that we amend the ESSER grant once it is approved to fund the increased positions and the rate increase. We would reduce the amount originally set aside for Facilities.

All in all, the research available has not shown any efforts or endeavors that have proved successful with alleviating the current crisis with substitute shortage. However, using our ESSER funds to provide Para subs or Building Substitutes for our neediest schools and increasing the day to day sub rate would be a good faith demonstration of our commitment to try to address the issue. These suggested solutions are the best options available to us at the moment. It is not 100% certain that these solutions will solve the problem but it could serve as a pilot that will allow us to offer information for decision making during the next budget season and immediately address a critical concern.